

# Waking the Sleeping Giant - 7

## *The Church's first Sermon*

Apparently, one of the greatest fears people have is the fear of speaking in public. It even ranks ahead of the fear of death! Can you imagine that fear increasing if you knew that you would be speaking to a hostile audience? Add to that the fact that the audience is not just a small group, but at least five to ten thousand hostile people, and you must address them without a modern sound system!

To make matters worse, you have made a fool of yourself only weeks before in such a manner that many in your audience would have heard about it. You would also have no time to prepare your message. The opportunity presents itself and you're on – without any warning or any notes!

Such was the situation facing the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost. The sound of the rushing wind from heaven had drawn a large crowd, which then heard all the believers speaking of the great deeds of God in the many different native languages of the crowd. This perplexed them and some were very curious, while others were mocking:

**Acts 2:12-13** *“Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”*

It was to this Jewish crowd in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been killed just only weeks before, that Peter delivered the sermon which launched the Church as we know it. In terms of a response - about 3,000 came to Christ that day! Clearly, an effective sermon!

Luke only gives us some of that great sermon (see 2:40). But even so, there is far more here than I can deal with adequately today, but I will give it a shot and hope that you might do some personal study later. I want to walk you through this sermon, explaining the flow of thought so that you grasp Peter's method and argument. Even though you may never be called upon to preach to a crowd, you will have opportunities to bear witness for Christ. Studying Peter's sermon may help you be ready.

**Acts 2:14-21** *“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

*“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

*I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

Peter begins with the questions that the crowd was asking about the phenomena of Pentecost, linking what they saw and heard to the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. He then changes focus rather abruptly:

**Acts 2:22-36** *“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:*

*“I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.”*

*“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

*“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

Peter makes it very clear that God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ (2:36). But he builds his argument inductively (a good method with hostile audiences), building his case point by point, but not giving the main point until last. When his audience responds with conviction of sin, asking, *“What shall we do?”* Peter tells them to repent and be baptized, and 3,000 did so. Let’s work through his sermon in more detail:

### **1. Joel prophesied about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that you have just witnessed (2:14-21)**

Notice that Peter appeals twice to his audience to listen carefully to his words (2:14,22). No matter how dynamic or dull the speaker may be, the audience has a responsibility to listen carefully. Even the Lord Jesus, the most gifted speaker in history, exhorted His audiences to take care how they listened (Luke 8:18). In other words, the responsibility for a good sermon lies not only with the preacher, but also with the hearers. We should always ask God to give us ears to hear what He wants to say to us through His Word.

Peter begins with a touch of humour. Some mockers were accusing the believers who spoke in tongues of being drunk. Peter could have ignored them or responded defensively, but instead he says, in effect, *“It’s too early for us to be drunk!”* The Jews would not normally have eaten or drunk at this hour during the Feast of Pentecost.

Then Peter explains that the phenomena they had seen and heard were *“what was spoken of through the prophet Joel”* (2:16). He proceeds to quote, with a few minor variations, Joel 2:28-32. Later Peter will cite Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1. He did not have a Bible in book form, since books as we know them were not even invented. And he did not unroll several scrolls to the right text so that he could read these verses. Rather, he recited them from memory!

Peter's citation of Joel makes three points:

a. *In the last days, God will pour out His Spirit on all people. (2:17-18)*

Joel's prophecy actually says, "after this," but Peter changes it to "the last days." The time from Jesus' first coming until His second coming can all be referred to as the last days. The Apostles did not know that it would stretch out over 2,000 years. But as Paul put it, we are the ones "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Peter warned "that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'" (2 Peter 3:3-4). He goes on to say that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. But Peter's citation of Joel is simply making the point, we are now in the end times when this prophecy will be fulfilled.

Peter's use of Joel is in line with what biblical scholars have identified from the Dead Sea Scrolls as a typical form of Hebrew teaching, called a 'pesher' (from the Hebrew word for 'interpretation'). Peter never specifically shows how prophecy, visions, and dreams are identified with the phenomenon of speaking in tongues that everyone had heard. But he seems to use this passage since it is the nearest equivalent to tongues in Old Testament phraseology.

Peter's main point is not the particular form that the outpouring of the Spirit took, but rather that He was poured out "on all flesh." Not just the prophets or rabbis, but even sons and daughters would experience this outpouring of the Spirit (2:17). Not just the older men, but also younger men would know the Lord and His will ('visions). Not just the wealthy, but even bondslaves would know the fulness of the Spirit. Not just men, but also women would have the Spirit. As the apostle Paul later taught, "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). No believer today lacks the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

b. *This outpouring of the Spirit will be followed by a time of judgement. (2:19-20)*

Peter did not know how soon these judgments would take place (since Joel does not indicate such). He was not claiming that they had been fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost; rather, he is saying that these things would precede "the great and glorious day of the Lord." Since the prophecy had begun to be fulfilled, as evidenced by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it is reasonable to assume that the rest will come to pass in due time.

Some relate these signs in the heavens back to the darkening of the sky on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, understanding them as tokens of the advent of the day of the Lord. Others interpret these signs as symbols for any cataclysmic judgments, whether volcanoes, earthquakes, fires, or whatever. But Revelation 6:12 predicts these same signs when the Lamb breaks the sixth seal during the Great Tribulation. Thus, the literal fulfillment still awaits that time just prior to the return of Christ. Peter's point is that the outpouring of the Spirit predicted by Joel has happened. The Messianic age has begun. Then Joel offers good news:

c. *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (2:21)*

Here is the great mercy of our God! He offers to those who deserve His judgment a means of escape. Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Up to this point, Peter has been rather generic. He has linked the phenomena of Pentecost to Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days. This hints that the day of the Messiah has dawned, inaugurating the last days, but he hasn't yet said that clearly.

He has also brought up the subject of God's judgment at the final Day of the Lord, but he hasn't stated yet that his audience (good religious Jews) need to fear that judgment. And he has set forth the offer of God's mercy for anyone who will take it. But now he shifts from preaching to meddling! He gets specific about just who this Lord is that a person must call upon to be saved. He shows them that they had crucified their Messiah!

## **2. God authenticated Jesus as both Lord and Christ (2:22-36)**

Although he doesn't drop the punch line until verse 36, Peter shows four ways that God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ:

### *a. God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ through His miracles. (2:22)*

Even Jesus' enemies had to accept the reality of His miracles (although some attributed them to Satan's power; Luke 11:15). But most people acknowledged, as Nicodemus did, that *"no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him"* (John 3:2). Peter reminds his audience that Jesus had done many such miracles in their midst, and they knew it.

While many in our day deny that miracles can occur, they are basing their denials on the assumption that God does not exist, contrary to much evidence in creation. The miracles that Jesus did, attested by many eyewitnesses, including His enemies (John 11:47), authenticate Him as Lord and Christ.

### *b. God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ through His death. (2:23)*

Here Peter treads on a number of toes: *"This man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."* Jesus' death at first glance may have seemed like something that invalidated His messianic claims. But Peter shows that Jesus was not killed because He was a victim of His enemies. He was killed because God predetermined before the world began that Jesus would die as the Saviour of His people. Isaiah 53:10 prophesied, *"But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief."* And so rather than invalidating Jesus as Lord and Messiah, His death actually validated Him since it was a fulfillment of God's eternal decree.

Does this mean that since God determined it, men are not responsible? No, Peter says, *"you nailed [Him] to a cross by the hands of lawless men [the Romans] and put Him to death."* Without violating their will, God used evil men to accomplish His eternal purpose, but those evil men were responsible for their crime. No one can blame God for their own sin.

### *c. God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ through His resurrection. (2:24-32)*

After spending one verse each on Jesus' life and death, Peter spends nine verses on His resurrection, which is the main theme of the apostolic preaching in Acts. Note the implicit contrast between *"you put Him to death. But God raised Him up again"* (2:23-24). In other words, they were guilty of opposing God!

Peter cites Psalm 16:8-11 to show an Old Testament prediction of the resurrection. In that psalm, David declares that God will not abandon his soul to Hades nor allow His holy one to undergo decay. But, Peter argues, David both died and was buried, and his tomb was right there in Jerusalem. In other words, David's body did undergo decay.

Therefore, David as a prophet knew that God had promised to seat one of his descendants on his throne, and so he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of Christ. Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah when he confidently states, *“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses”* (2:32). Perhaps the other eleven standing with Peter nodded in affirmation.

Thus, Jesus’ miracles, death and resurrection all authenticate Him as both Lord and Christ. But there is a final piece of evidence:

*d. God authenticated Jesus as Lord and Christ through His exaltation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (2:33-36)*

Peter states that the ascended, exalted Jesus was the One Who had sent the Holy Spirit as evidenced by the miracle of everyone speaking in foreign languages. Again, he cites David in Psalm 110:1, *“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”* Since David is not seated at God’s right hand, this must refer to the Messiah. A not-so-subtle implication is that the enemies of the Messiah are those who crucified Him! Then Peter comes to his punch line in verse 36: *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified.”* You can’t get much clearer than that!

### **3. The crowd’s response and Peter’s application. (2:37-41)**

*a. The crowd responds with conviction. (2:37)*

To be *“pierced to the heart”* shows their feelings of deep anguish as they realized that they were guilty of killing their own Messiah. The Holy Spirit stabbed them with conviction of their terrible sin. Charles Spurgeon once said, *“It is idle to attempt to heal those who are not wounded, to attempt to clothe those who have never been stripped, and to make those rich who have never realized their poverty.”* The conviction of sin is often the missing note in our evangelistic efforts. We are too quick in trying to heal people who do not realize how mortally ill they really are. Only after the Spirit of God brings a deep revelation of the reality of their sinful condition, can the gospel of God’s amazing grace truly impact them and transform them.

*b. Peter applies the message: Repentance, baptism and promise. (2:38-40)*

First Peter calls upon them to repent. There are many in our day who argue that repentance has no place in salvation; rather, all a person must do is believe in Christ. Repentance, they say, comes later. If so, Peter botched the gospel! The fact is repentance and faith are flip sides of the same coin. You cannot have true saving faith without repentance. Others minimize the definition of repentance, saying that it means simply to change your mind about who Jesus is. Certainly, it includes that, but it is more than that. Howard Marshall writes, *“The word indicates a change of direction in a person’s life rather than simply a mental change of attitude or a feeling of remorse; it signifies a turning away from a sinful and godless way of life.”* Faith in Jesus Christ is implicit in repentance, as it also is in Peter’s next word.

*“Each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”* Peter is calling them to an individual response. Salvation always is a personal transaction, not a group plan. As with John the Baptist’s ministry, he links repentance, baptism, and forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Baptism is never just an outward ritual, but rather is a public confession of one’s private faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ. Those who argue that you must be baptized to be saved use this verse as their proof text. But they ignore both the context of this verse and the overwhelming testimony of Scripture, that salvation is by grace through faith, and that good works (such as baptism) are the *result* of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Granted, the notion of an unbaptized believer was foreign to the Apostles, since it was assumed that saving faith would result in prompt obedience to Jesus Christ. But, in the next chapter (3:19), Peter calls his audience to repent *“so that your sins may be wiped away,”* but he never mentions baptism. When Peter called upon these people to be baptized, he was calling them to make a radical break with their culture and religion that had crucified the Messiah, and to be publicly identified with Jesus Christ. This outward symbol would prove the reality of their inward repentance and faith, and the fact that God had forgiven their sins.

Then, Peter proclaims God’s promise, that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. When they repented and trusted in Christ, the Holy Spirit was a part of God’s gift of salvation. Peter extends the promise beyond them to their children and beyond them to those who are far off, *“as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”* While salvation, on the one hand, requires that a person call on the name of the Lord (2:21), on the other hand no one calls on the Lord unless the Lord first calls him/her to Himself (2:39). Although Peter may not have understood that yet, those who are far off no doubt referred to the Gentiles. Luke summarizes Peter’s further exhortations with, *“Be saved from this perverse generation”* (2:40). Salvation always demands a radical break from our wicked culture.

*c. The result: 3,000 souls brought to Jesus. (2:41)*

Much modern evangelism tries to make becoming a Christian as easy as possible. We dodge the issue of sin. We don’t talk about the cost of discipleship. We wouldn’t dare call on people to make a radical break with their culture. But Peter called them to repentance and baptism. For a Jew to be baptized was a traumatic thing. They generally looked on baptism as a rite for Gentile converts or for notorious sinners, not for “good” Jews. But Peter preached boldly, God worked inwardly, and the Church was launched - 3,000 strong! Peter’s sermon in a nutshell was: *Since God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ who will judge the world, sinners must repent.*

The point of biblical evangelism is not to make people feel good about who they are or to feel that God loves them just as they are (even though that is true). Rather, it is to show them who Jesus Christ truly is, the Lord of the universe, the Christ of God who offered Himself for our sins and who was raised from the dead. It should show them who they are, sinners who crucified the Son of God, who deserve God’s judgment. It should then show them God’s great mercy, that if they will repent and call on the name of the Lord, He will save them from His judgment. It should also show them the need to follow Christ and embrace His mission all the days of their life.